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# hoi polloi

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**hoi polloi**

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Each year at Gainesville College people interested in publishing a good selection of essays organize to gather and glean the best of the harvest. This year, the cream of the crop is an exceptional array of model formal and informal essays written by students of Gainesville College. Included you will find the first and second place winners of both the formal and informal essay categories in the writing contest: formal first place, Daidra Partee's "There's More than One at 'Home on the Range'"; formal second place, Laura Wade's "An Explication of Tennyson's 'Crossing the Bar'"; informal first place, Natasha Crandall's "Is the Latest the Greatest?"; and informal second place, Julie Northington's "This Old House." The remaining six essays are formal essays the English Club chose as examples of student work that is worth sharing. It is our hope that this year's collection of essays not only provides readers with great reading but also renders a feeling for the standard of a good essay.

*hoi polloi* '94 could not be what it is without the collaborative effort of serious literary devotees such as the faculty editorial board which includes Dr. Frankie Abercrombie, Dr. Sallie Duhling, Ann Purdy, Belinda Sauret, and Dr. Thomas Tuggle; Janice Nylander who made herself available to prepare or proofread at whim; and Tom Sauret, advisor of the English Club, who persistently encouraged the staff of the magazine and single handedly lent technological support necessary to produce the publication. I want to thank Dr. Glenda McLeod for her contributions to *hoi polloi*. Dr. McLeod gave the magazine staff absolute creative license and also invested massive quantities of precious personal time to its success. I must also thank the members of the English Club for being a part of this year's cosmic convergence of literary energy--students at the right place at the right time, always saying yes, always delivering and always just doing it!

Marleen Springston

# introduction

## There's More Than One at Home on the Range

*Daidra Partee*

Every person reaches that certain point in life when he begins to second-guess his past decisions. This time, for most who experience it, is filled with fear and regret. A person, in his attempts to find himself, often finds an alternate identity, a personality that differs greatly from his own. "The Jolly Corner" by Henry James and "Miriam" by Truman Capote are two ghost stories that explore the question that philosophers have been struggling with for years: does the "self" really exist? In both of these stories, the identities of the characters are threatened by a ghost who represents an alternate personality that may exist within them. These stories explore the possibility of multiple "selves" existing in a single mind. The ghosts, and the terror that they bring to the characters, are the focus of these two short stories, as they illustrate the fragility of the human mind and the importance of personal identity.

"The Jolly Corner" tells the story of a man experiencing a mid-life crisis. An American, Spencer Brydon, after living most of his life in Europe, begins to wonder if the decision he made years ago was the correct one. In his search to find the man that he could have been, he finds the ghost of himself residing in the house where he grew up on the jolly corner.



This apparition resembles Spencer in a terrifying way. He is described as "... the prodigy of a personal presence" (173), with a "... grizzled bent head and white, masking hands" (174). With the description of Spencer that James provides, one realizes that the ghost appears to look almost identical to Spencer. The protagonist himself even says that "... no portrait by a great modern master could have presented him with more intensity ... for the bared identity [is] as hideous as his" (174). Spencer's reaction to this substitute is one of fear, shock, and revulsion. The ghost, "... gloom[ing] and loom[ing], [and] advanc[ing] as if for aggression" (175), frightens Spencer and causes him to "... fall back as [if] under ... a rage of personality before which his own collapse[s]. He feels the whole vision turn to darkness and his feet give way" (175).

There are several reasons for Spencer's terror-stricken reaction. First of all, James is careful to ensure that the reader understand the great resemblance between the two Spencers. In all actuality, they are two versions of the same man. Secondly, Spencer realizes that his personality cannot exist along with that of the ghost's. Only one of the identities can be in control; this explains why Spencer loses consciousness when the ghost enters the room. Because of the knowledge that Spencer has, he views the ghost as a threat to his personal identity. He fears that this new identity will take control over him, and the Spencer whom he knows will cease to exist.

Mrs. H. T. Miller, like Spencer Brydon, has an experience with a ghost that threatens her identity. Her experience is unlike that of Spencer's in the sense that her torment stems from an exterior source, not an interior one. Miriam is a little girl whose presence oddly excites Mrs. Miller. The child is described to the reader as having "... hair ... the longest and straightest ... absolutely silver-white, like an albino's" (356) and "... hazel eyes, steady, lacking any childlike quality ... seem[ing] to consume her face" (356). Having already been given a description of Mrs. Miller, the reader is able to see that the two characters are very different in appearance. Whereas Mrs. Miller is a plain, ordinary looking old lady, Miriam is dressed in a very sophisticated manner with fancy clothes and expensive jewelry. In fact, there is only one thing that the two have in common: they share the same name. This is, perhaps, the one thing that threatens Mrs. Miller the most. An individual's name is the single most personal thing that the individual owns; and once this is taken away, much of the sense of separate identity is lost.



An interesting thing to note about this story is the snow that always falls before Miriam makes one of her grand entrances. This snow, like Miriam, is beautiful but deadly, and it silently covers everything. Similarly, Mrs. Miller, being a very trusting person, at first does not realize how manipulative and deadly the little girl will prove to be. Miriam's manipulation begins as soon as she arrives at Mrs. Miller's apartment. She criticizes the decor and then proceeds to get Tommy, Mrs. Miller's canary, to sing "... as he did in the morning and at no other time" (359). Although this seems like an insignificant thing, it is actually a key part of Miriam's plan. Most will agree that a pet trusts his owner and no one else. However, the little girl has gained the trust and obedience of Tommy. Like the snowfall that announces her arrival, Miriam succeeds in silently covering up-and thus killing off-Mrs. Miller's identity. Mrs. Miller, like a helpless traveller in the snow, is intimidated by Miriam; and realizing this, she is afraid that her weak character will be overpowered by Miriam's strong and forceful one. As Mrs. Miller's identity is indeed absorbed, she becomes the ghost.

James and Capote, in these stories, attempt to explain and prove that more than one "self" exists in the single mind of an individual. Given that precept, these two stories are rather disturbing since they threaten our comfortable ideas of who we are and what we will become. In modern society, we have been taught self-reliance and the importance of remaining true to ourselves. However, is it possible that there is more than one of us at home? And if there is, upon whom can we rely? These are questions we all ask ourselves at some time in our life; and when asking these questions, we must be able to overcome the terror that accompanies the threat. If we cannot, the person each of us is-our individuality-will cease to exist, as Mrs. Miller does.

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Crossing the Bar

*Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar  
When I put to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell  
When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crossed the bar.



## An Explication of Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar"

*Laura Wade*

"Crossing the Bar" is, as are many of Tennyson's works, a poem primarily concerned with death. Unlike the solemn, contemplative tone of "Break, Break, Break," written in response to the death of his daughter, "Crossing the Bar" instead conveys Tennyson's contentment with the idea of his own mortality. His association of death with the quiet calm of water (rather than the typically harsh Christian image of "ashes to ashes, dust to dust") reveals his willingness to return to the "boundless deep" from whence he originated.

"Crossing the Bar" likens death to a late-night journey out to sea. Unlike many of his peers, Tennyson's portrayal of death is not frightful and sudden. The "Sunset and evening star" of the first line represent signposts in the slow progression through old age towards death which, personified, then addresses the author with "one clear call" towards his destiny. Tennyson obeys the call and boards the vessel which will take him "out to sea." Here, the author is reminded of those he is leaving behind. He makes a wish that they should not mourn his passing. Just as a sandbar on the outskirts of a harbor scrapes along the hull of a boat to keep it close to shore, so does the lamentation of loved ones make it harder for dying men to pass away in peace. Tennyson, therefore,

requests that "there be no moaning of the bar/when I put out to sea."

Tennyson states in the second stanza that although the sea, because of its placid surface, appears to be sleeping, it is actually churning in its effort to hasten its traveller and is "Too full [of purpose] for sound and foam." Sound and foam, therefore, are seen by the author as being just for show, as what the sea does outwardly when it has no important purpose with which to occupy itself. Then, in line seven, Tennyson refers again to his own journey and, specifically, to the place which serves as both his origin and his present destination: "When that which drew from out the boundless deep/turns again home." One can only speculate, at this point, as to Tennyson's opinion of what this destination might be like; whether it is closer to Heaven or to Hell (or is some combination of the two) is left to interpretation. One can assume, however, that Tennyson's "boundless deep" is not a place that he fears, drawing from the gentle tone of the poem. The ninth line mirrors the first line in its naming of metaphors for the various stages in the progression towards death. The author has now completed his progression through the "Sunset and evening star" of old age and has come upon the "twilight" of his days on earth. The "evening bell" is now calling him in the same manner as the "one clear call" of the first stanza. Once the twilight has faded, the author's world becomes dark, signalling the end of his life. Instead of the conventional fear in response to the darkness and finality of death, Tennyson again turns to concern for the living, wishing that "... there be no sadness of farewell/when I embark."

In the fourth stanza, Tennyson explains not only why his friends and family should not mourn his death, but also why he is so reconciled to the idea of going "home." Through his death, he is abandoning the "bourne of Time and Place" that he and everyone he knows have occupied together. He is abandoning his niche in the physical and historical world to go where "the flood may bear [him] far" from what is known. Tennyson readily accepts, even embraces, the uncertainty in his future. The sound of the "moaning of the bar" represents a funeral dirge or the joined lamentations of family and friends. Tennyson's unshakable faith in his spiritual beliefs keeps him afloat in his solitary vessel and allows him to pass over the bar without the moaning. Tennyson continues his metaphor through the end of the last stanza, where he reveals the driving force behind his travels. This driving force is his goal to "cross the bar" and then come face to face with God. Tennyson sees God not as a separate and untouchable Master of fate, but rather as one



who gently guides. This guidance is manifested in the image of God as "Pilot" of that final trip out with the ebbing tide. Tennyson extends God's involvement to acting as Pilot of his entire life.

Tennyson seems to have little remorse concerning the way he lived his life and the experience of learning it. This is reflected in the organization of the work. The poem itself is symmetrically constructed. The abab rhyme scheme and evenly constructed stanzas add to the feeling of calm conveyed by the words. The familiar rhythm established by the rise of iambic pentameter also helps to reinforce the feeling of familiarity and comfort that Tennyson has upon returning "home." Tennyson expresses admiration for the skill with which he was guided through life, and his desire "to see [his] Pilot face to face" could stem from either an awe concerning the Pilot's very existence or a desire to thank him for a job well done.

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## Is the Latest the Greatest?

Natasha Crandall

Living in the nineties, we are surrounded by technology. We often feel inundated by the vast array of technological advances being promoted for all areas of life from entertainment to industry. But are all of these technological advances beneficial or desirable? Definitely not! An excellent example of one that many find detrimental is video game systems because of the potentially negative effect the games can have on avid players. Research on the extent of the effects of video games on children is still in its formative years, but video games have already been found to be addictive and to promote violence and gender stereotyping.

Do you think *addictive* too strong a word? Maybe so, but I assure you that if you had lived with my brother Shane during the phase of his life when he was obsessed with video games, you would probably change your mind. After buying or renting a new game, Shane would sit tensely hunched up on the couch for hours at a time—twelve hours was the record—captivated by the glowing screen. Sometimes the only sign of life would be his thumbs pounding the buttons on the control box gripped tightly in his hands. The family would always know when he was losing because he would very audibly express his frustration and beat the couch or occasionally himself with a clenched fist. My brother would become



oblivious to the real world--totally consumed by the challenge to beat the game. When told to stop and come eat or to take a break and go play outside, Shane would reply, "In a minute..., just one more level..." or "I'm almost there. I can't possibly stop now." Shane would rapidly lose the idea of playing for fun and would only play to beat the game. He would have a bad day until he won the game, and consequently, so would the rest of the family because he would take his frustration out on us after he was pried away from the game. Even when he was not playing the games, he was still consumed by them. Discussions with friends were dominated by the newest techniques and the latest apparatus. Even at night, Shane would go to bed counting his money to see if he had enough to buy or rent yet another video game or game system. Unfortunately, my brother was not alone in his addiction. Some of my peers also admit to being or having been "hooked" on these games. Even the first and second grade boys that I taught during summer school loved to spend breakfast and lunch break telling me about their Gameboys and Nintendos.

In addition to their addictive effect, video games can also influence children's minds in a more subtle way. What hidden messages do video games send children? One of the most harmful is that violence is an acceptable way to handle problems. As Professor of Education Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr., from the University of Miami notes, "Violence...becomes the only viable operative principle by which a player can function." Children are often times immersed in a cold, brutal world where it is kill or be killed. In the most popular games that I have watched being played, the only route to success lay through a corpse-littered path. The games are programmed in such a way that players must depend solely on force rather than reason to win. Video games certainly do not teach the skill of negotiation!

Many people are unaware of how violent these games really are. In December 1989, the National Coalition on TV Violence (NCTV) released a monitoring of 176 Nintendo games. The coalition concluded that 80% of these contained harmful violence and 44% of these should have the X rating for extreme violence. Twenty-two of the twenty-seven studies the NCTV cited found that video games did have harmful effects. From personal experience, I know that my brother was definitely more disagreeable and argumentative after spending the day playing video games. The new game *Night Trap* for the Sega CD was banned in Canada and Britain because of the negative effect it seemed to have on children. After playing this game full of graphic violence, children were notably



more aggressive on the playground. Many will argue that video games do not affect all children in the same way. Of course not! But is it wise to expose impressionable children to such graphic excesses of violence for long periods of time thereby possibly reinforcing their disposition to aggression?

Video games not only promote violence but also gender stereotyping and sex bias. Rather than strike a dominant pose, women, when included in the games, are usually acted upon. A study cited in an article in, *Education Digest* Dec. 92, notes that the covers of the forty-seven most popular Nintendo games portray 115 male and nine female characters--a ratio of nearly 13-1. According to the November 93, issue of *Video World* magazine, only one game listed in the top ten lists of both Super Nintendo and Sega combined has a female character; this character, Chun Li from *Street Fighter II*, is only one of twelve characters that one can select--the rest being males.

While many games simply do not include women, others actually have the abuse of women as part of the theme of the games. *Night Trap* is an excellent example. In it, a group of women are being stalked and gruesomely murdered in their house, and it is the player's objective to trap these stalkers in time. Do children really need to start acting out real life tragedies and by doing so become immune to the pain and suffering these acts cause? According to several sources including *Prevention* magazine, 75 percent of video game players are male. Because of this, portraying women as weaker, unimportant, and easily violated can hardly be considered healthy in a society where the rates of crimes against women are already soaring.

Even though video games addict players and promote violence and sex bias, many hours of practice do develop eye-hand coordination, and initially players find many of the games fun to play. Both of these are pale pluses in comparison to jeopardizing a child's mental health. When I asked my brother and other game addicts what redeeming value video games possess, their answer can be summed up by my brother's response, "Absolutely none, but they're still fun to play." Given this response and the mounting negative evidence such as I have just cited, I am left with a disturbing question: can video games be considered a truly beneficial technological advance? I think not.



## This Old House

*Julie Northington*

When I think of my childhood, the most sentimental memory I have is of the house where I grew up. It is a stately, older home in Decatur, Georgia. Our family moved into the house when I was seven years old, and at that time I didn't recognize it as being a stately, beautiful home. All I knew then was that I had to change schools and make new friends. I've thought a lot about this house lately since my parents are thinking of moving to a smaller house that's all on one level.

When I think back to the days when we first moved there, the thing that comes to mind immediately is how big everything seemed at the age of seven. Looking at the outside of the house from the street, it seemed huge and foreboding when compared to the house we had moved from. It's a four story house, including the attic and basement, made of brick with dark gray trim. It reminds me now of Victorian England and I love the house, but when we first moved in, on a dark and rainy winter day, it looked downright scary. On the inside there were high ceilings and what seemed like a very long staircase, and I can remember feeling very small inside that house when I was young. Now that I'm grown the ceilings seem to have come down and the staircase seems of normal height.

In the kitchen there is a long semi-circular counter top, with the

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side of the refrigerator against one end of it. Every day when I got home, from school I would sit on the counter with my back propped against the refrigerator and watch the little black and white television that my mother kept on the counter. I don't remember exactly when it happened, but one day I ceased to physically fit in that spot. Whenever I'm in the kitchen now I look at the spot in amazement, wondering how I ever fit up there and wishing, sometimes, that I could go back to the days when I did fit up there.

Of all the memories I have of this house, there are certain ones that seem more prominent, probably because there are reminders of them from time to time. Every house has certain smells and sounds that go with it, and this one is no exception. It never seems like Christmas until I've visited my parents and smelled the potpourri my mother simmers on the stove at that time of year. Now that I have a house of my own I purchase the customary Christmas items, like potpourri, but it just doesn't seem to smell the same way in my house as it does in my parents'. One also gets used to hearing certain sounds in a house, and one of the sounds I grew up with is the sound of the Marta rail running through Decatur and into Avondale. It's not an obnoxiously loud sound, but it can be heard as the train tracks are only two streets over and parallel our house. One evening a couple of years ago my husband and I were sitting in the den of the house with my parents, when out of nowhere we heard this loud, roaring train noise, then a whistle blowing. I looked at my mother in a half-questioning, half-shocked way, and she threw her head back and laughed. She knew precisely what I was questioning: an unfamiliar noise. She explained to me that it was the New Georgia Railroad train going through the depot in Decatur, and assured me that, just like the Marta train, we would get used to it in time.

Another fond memory I have of this house is sitting with my bedroom window open and looking at the hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of fireflies that gathered in the old, tall trees in the backyard. It is really spectacular to watch all these twinkling lights, and almost mesmerizing. When I was younger and had something on my mind, I would look out at the fireflies until I had mentally resolved whatever was bothering me. When I was twelve, my grandfather died, so I watched the light show that evening. It occurred to me then that in the grand scheme of things, we were all like those tiny lights on the fireflies - here one minute and gone the next. A comforting thought came to me then. I realized,



watching the fireflies, that as one light disappeared, another light appeared. I also noticed that it was tiresome and almost impossible to isolate one little light, and that what made the light show so beautiful was all of the lights flickering together. I realized that life in general was like this light show, with thousands of elements coming together to make one big picture. For a long time I suppose I thought I was the only one who enjoyed watching the fireflies. One night as my husband and I were leaving the house, my parents walked us to our car. It was a nice evening and before I knew it we were all four standing there, staring up at the trees and the light show that was taking place.

When I was a teenager I spent all of my time and energy trying to get away from this house. Now, as an adult, I want to spend as much time there as I can. In fact, I yearn to be there in that house from time to time, and I can't decide if it's the time or the place that I want to return to. I've told my parents that when they're ready to move I'll help them clean out the attic, clean out the basement, and pack the boxes, but when moving day comes, I'll just meet them at the new house.

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## Medea Omnipotent: Euripides' Redefinition of the World Order

Howard Keeley

The essential, indelible impact of Euripides' *Medea* exists in the single, calamitous exploit which constitutes the drama's crisis, the protagonist's slaying of her progeny. Incredulity and dread permeate the audience as it discerns that the discounted, disaffected Medea will surpass the limit of expediency, the boundary separating responsible rationality from delirious self-indulgence. In contrast, the violent gouging out of Oedipus' eyes in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, though horrendous, is, technically, incidental to that tragedy's climax. While it realizes the seminal sight and insight motif of the play and permits the protagonist to assert his autonomy, the Theban king's self-wounding belongs to the denouement; it is a ramification of the crisis (the cognition of the oracular riddle). Typical of Greek playwrights of the Golden Age, Euripides explores several momentous themes within the context of inexorable action; however, in *Medea* cerebral considerations are blotted out by the magnitude of the final portentous impudence. Infanticide, unthinkable and unnatural, becomes actual; the Chorus' belief in a maternal verity (it insists that even a wild animal will cherish her own offspring) is exploded. Jason's more phlegmatic verities—male superiority, the excellence of Hellenic civilization and the need for political decisiveness—suffer catastrophic reversal through the resolute decision of Medea, "a



woman, a foreigner," to meet out "grief for grief." Despite vacillation (for these characters are not one-dimensional, but tenable, complex human beings), and despite the counsel of the old, sagacious order personified in the nurse, the protagonist ultimately determines that her defenseless charges must be sacrificed so that she may maintain faith with her ideas. Thus, a new order is initiated. There is a dire absolutism here: Corinth's potency, its capacity to regenerate and reassert itself, is destroyed. Jason may not even assay his loss through touching the bloody, unfledged bodies framed in the serpent-guarded doorway. Similarly, Helios' absolving of Medea debars the audience from resolving its trauma at the liquidation of hope; one recalls Laurence Binyon's assertion in his poem "The Burning of the Leaves," "The world that was ours is a world that is ours no more."

Euripides was active at the culmination of the Athenian Golden Age, just prior to the protracted and disastrous Peloponnesian War, a period of both blind pride and widespread dubiety. In *Medea* he prophesies the undoing of the world order. His audience witnesses the sacrosanct tenets of the Hellenic canon being disaffirmed and inverted by a reckless alien, "a wolf from Asia." However, it is the inconsistent and discriminatory nature of those tenets that causes Medea's disaffection and induces her dreadful revenge. Greek democracy disallowed the "private"; its "rational sunlight" permitted Jason to abandon his wife for the political advantage perceived in another. Medea, though inherently "somewhat rash and intemperate" (prior to the drama she killed her brother Pelias), is no aberrant juggernaut of evil. In a poignant vignette, she notices the "fragrance" on her sons' breath; truly, "the people of Asia are human, too." Euripides' purpose in planting Medea into the self-possessed polis of Corinth is to admit "a root of disturbance" into the status quo. The protagonist abjures the unquestioning espousal of a pantheon of cryptic, capricious gods; Jason is insightful in his pronouncement, "You fear nothing; nothing can touch you." She effectively rejects the nurse's and the Greeks' conventional belief system. Through Medea's terrible triumph, Euripides comments on a dying religion, a dying dispensation. Helios' appearance in the final scene is much more than an *ex machina* maneuver; it is an ironic confirmation that humans control their own destinies, that god is created in the image of man.

Euripides exposes the fact that humans are barely civilized. In disparaging the ingratiating, "smiling, chattering Greeks" in the open-



ing episode, Medea causes the audience to query the worth of Hellenic culture. Recondite characterization and an integrated plot lend this questioning enhanced validity during the rising action. Key players do not desert the protagonist despite her mania. A female bond exists between the Chorus and Medea; in acknowledging her faithfulness and her vital sexuality ("She can make old men young again"), the Corinthian women refuse to subscribe to Jason's disparaging biases and impart merit to the cry that "It is a bitter thing to be a woman." Jason, despite being capable of relating passionately to his estranged wife, is portrayed as pathetic by the measure of the "weakness-despising stars"; even his vaunted exploits with the Argonauts depended on Medea for their success. Manifesting cosmic myopia, he associates with the gods and with the world on the basis of sexist, ungracious expedience. To Jason, women are the natural "instruments" of men. The protagonist determines to "unchild" her former husband, thus rendering him as impotent corporally as his world view is metaphysically. In accordance with the beast motif, both Jason and Creon are termed "dogs." The king, the earthly symbol and steward of Olympian power, is irresolute in dispatching Medea and in jeopardizing the polis, is compelled to admit, "I'm a fool in my own eyes." There are, indeed, many serious inconsistencies, weaknesses, and flaws in the Corinthian body politic; Medea, the supreme victim of these demerits, girds herself to purge them.

Bestial and bloody metaphors gain ascendancy as Medea, through emotion, intellect and will, breaches what the Chorus terms the "terrible acropolis of her mind." Strategically, taking "one thing at a time," she confronts the horrors that Euripides perceives in the human psyche. In invoking Hades, the protagonist effectively negates the oracular gods; she will transact not with riddles but, rather, elects emphatic action. Her frightful "images of the mind . . . work their way out" to redefine the world order, to create a new governance, that of Helios. However, money abides in the realm of the sun king. Its destructiveness is well symbolized in marvels at how the leopard loose in the marketplace anticipates the law-of-the-jungle ethos so much a feature of modern stock exchanges and big business. However, the salient horror of this drama remains the infanticide, the liquidation of the defenseless and differentiated. This is the ultimate crime, yet, despite dramatic anguish and entreaty, it occurs. *Medea* is truly a play for our dark century for we-intellectual, cultivated, civilized-created, through the expedience of the Hall of Mirrors, the



rationale by which many righteous, analytical, but disenfranchised Germans ignored or condoned the Holocaust. This drama is not exaggerated; we live the denouement of its formidable truth.

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## Religious Meanings Found in Herman Melville's Novels

Sonya Duck

Herman Melville was a serious Bible reader, but, to him, the Bible was contradictory. It aroused feelings of uncertainty within his mind. He believed that Christianity was the center of order, yet he thought that it was slowly slipping out of reach for the civilized man. To prove his points about religion, Melville used Biblical allusions and symbols to enrich the themes of *Typee*, *Billy Budd*, and *Moby Dick*. The references varied considerably, from the paradise of Eden to the crucifixion of Christ. However, all fell into two distinct groups: events that depicted violence and destruction and episodes of vision and revelation (Wright 24-25). During Melville's life span, many people were not ready for novels that indulged in human behavior, sacrifice, or the evil of civilized society. Some critics have said that Melville did not intend for his novels to be understood and appreciated by readers during the nineteenth century; he wrote the stories for future generations. In today's society, readers no longer debate the lack of civility throughout his books; instead, they discuss the allegorical meanings presented by religious symbols and allusions (Hillway 139-142).

*Typee*, Melville's first novel, depicted his life from 1841 to 1844 (Sedgwick 19). After the publication of the book, Rowland A. Sherrill stated that Melville was "completely untutored in the craft of fiction"



(7). However, Melville's little "Peep at Polynesian Life" (the subtitle), which retold his own South Seas adventures, addresses one of the most compelling metaphors of the regnant cultural mentality in America—the Typee Valley compared to the idealistic Eden (Sherrill 7).

Tommo, the protagonist, is Melville's "American Adam" in search of a paradise garden. He wants to shake free the corruption of civilized society and to search for new and fresh possibilities of innocence (Sherrill 7). After he escapes from his ship, Tommo stumbles upon his paradise: "when I looked around the verdant recesses in which I was buried, and gazed up to the Summits of the lofty eminence that hemmed me in, I was well disposed to think that I was in the 'Happy Valley,' and that beyond those heights there was nought but a world of care and anxiety" (Melville, *Typee* 124). After a glimpse of the valley, Tommo feels that he has entered a prelapsarian village. He wants to dispose of his civilized background and to become a new resident in this barbarian paradise (Sherrill 7). The valley is truly a sort of Eden before the Fall. He enters Typee among the dreaded cannibalistic savages. Surprisingly, the savages are gentle and generous, and they respect him. The Typee cannibals treat Tommo in the same manner that the wild animals of Eden treated Adam. He mentally and physically becomes Adam. Tommo and his Eve, Faraway, roam the village naked without any outward timidity. It is as if the Apple episode has never occurred. Together they seek no apple of knowledge; they yearn only for each other's love. Tommo receives everything a man can want in paradise: plenty of food, sweet water, beautiful habitat, happy people, a desirable woman, and no need to wear stifling clothes (Chase 14).

Critics have argued over why Tommo escapes the paradisiacal environment. It is evident to the reader that even paradise cannot produce total happiness. Richard Chase believed that man cannot revert to the life of a savage after he has once lived in civilization. The South Sea Islander is centuries behind the civilized man in the struggle of life and consciousness. This proposes a time lapse that hinders the white sailor from agreeing to take part in all of the cannibals' actions. As much as Melville hated the white civilization (the ravaging wolves) and loved the savages (the laughing lambs) he could not live a life among them. The same is true with Tommo. He wants to be among the savages, he tries to be a part of them, but his mind and body will not allow him to live with the group of cannibals. Physically, Tommo's leg becomes infected during his stay in the valley, and the savages' medicines make the pain and infection worse.



The inhumane rituals of the cannibals also eat away at his soul, and he comes to the conclusion that he must leave his paradise. Tommo realizes that his Eden is an impossible paradise for the modern man (Sherrill 23).

In another work, Melville addresses some of the same aspects. *Billy Budd* is a religious allegory that attacks the issues of good and evil. Melville creates an innocence in *Billy Budd* that is ultimately doomed by black malice (Chase 159). Through the personification of good and evil, he illustrated the continuous battle between these two forces (Wright 72). Melville used over one hundred allusions to the Bible and twenty-two direct references. The deaths of John Claggart and Billy Budd are paralleled to several different Bible stories found throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

John Claggart despises the looks and strength of Billy Budd. This emotion is shared by King Saul, who envies the young David (I Samuel 18:1-8). Billy has obtained a popularity among his shipmates that Claggart has never been able to acquire. To Claggart, this becomes a threat to his power, just as David's heroic stance to the subjects of Israel becomes a threat to Saul's power: "... And the evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul ... and Saul cast the spear, for he thought, 'I'll pin David to the wall'..." (I Samuel 18:10-11). Claggart's actions are identical to those of King Saul. He pursues Billy with the intent to kill him. John Claggart presents Captain Vere with false information concerning Billy Budd, the beloved sailor: "... and a look such as might have been that of the spokesman of the envious children of Jacob, deceptively imposing upon the troubled patriarch the blood dyed coat of young Joseph" (Melville, *Billy Budd* 64). Claggart represents the envious; he is the bearer of bad news. He feels that the accusation will destroy Billy and would bring fame to Claggart's name (Bloom, *Herman Melville* 208). Joseph's brothers experience tragedies because God punishes them for their deceit. Claggart's retribution against Billy also destroys his life. Billy Budd is struck with disbelief when John Claggart openly accuses him of rebellion. Claggart is compared to Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus. Both men betray innocence to achieve authority. Envy and jealousy drive each man to betrayal when, deep down, each loves the innocent man with his heart (Wright 130).

The biblical allusion most frequently analogized with *Billy Budd* is the fall of Adam. John Claggart is the serpent in Billy's Eden; he is the tempter and destroyer. Billy is the Adam before the fall (Levin 196). Just as Adam has no knowledge of evil before he is tempted by Satan to eat of the tree



of knowledge, Billy has no comprehension of the world's evil forces. When Billy becomes aware of these forces, his life is doomed. Adam is also sentenced to future death when he becomes aware of evil. Billy's original sin is striking back at Claggart, which allows Satan to control his actions. Adam, like Billy, experiences a fall from innocence because his actions are influenced by Satan (Levin 196). Claggart perfectly fits the role of the serpent. As he accuses Billy, his eyes change from a light to a muddy purple, which resembles the color of a reptile's eyes. After being struck by Billy, his body sags into the Captain's arms like coils of a dead snake. God punishes Claggart in the same way he punishes the serpent. Before the fall of Adam, the snake walks upright, but, afterwards, God sentences the snake to crawl on his stomach (Genesis 3:14-15). Similarly, Claggart is expelled to earth's surface, never to rise again.

Melville uses many symbols when he describes Billy Budd the night before the execution. Billy sleeps that night among the black guns of the upper deck. The blackness contrasts with Billy's white clothing to produce an image of discolored snow. The color differentiation symbolizes Billy's mortality that has been tarnished by the filth of evil (Vincent 25). Billy's rosy flesh has evaporated, and his body appears as only an outline of a skeleton. This is Melville's technique of illustrating the day's strain, which is symbolic of Christ's suffering. Billy is still a budding man, a handsome baby whose cradle is ship machinery. The reader visualizes two images of Christ in this scene, a condemned man and an innocent baby.

When the morning of Billy Budd's execution finally arrives, he, like Jesus, knows that the plan must be completed. He gives little resistance, and his last wish is for his crucifiers to be forgiven (Wright 128). Christ's crucifixion is paralleled by Billy's execution: "It was now about the sixth hour and there was darkness over the whole land . . . Then Jesus crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this, he breathed his last . . . He [the centurion] praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent'" (Luke 23:44-47). Both Billy and Jesus enter death with a prayer on their lips. Billy realizes that Vere, like Pilate, deserves more pity than he does. Billy's last words, "God bless Captain Vere!", are words of forgiveness toward Captain Vere, comparable to Jesus's words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing" (Luke 23:35). Just as the centurion blessed Jesus, the other sailors echoed, "God bless Captain Vere," in approval and acceptance for Billy Budd (Braswell 123). Billy's execution is purified by



the absence of the usual sexual spasm commonly associated with a hanging (Levin 197). This strengthens the symbolism of purity that connects Billy to Christ. As Billy descends, the dawn breaks and the eastern sky resembles the fleece of the Lamb of God (Wright 163). This too is comparable to the change in light when Jesus breathed his last breath.

Herman Melville believed that society often required a sacrifice to preserve the accepted law and order, although it was not necessarily right. In Melville's *Billy Budd*, Billy's execution is a willing sacrifice to social necessity. This sacrifice is a symbol of all the sins of the world; it produces a spark of hope for eventual moral rebirth (Hillway 141). Melville also believed that man should control his fate by controlling his actions. *Billy Budd* illustrates the difficulty in reaching this objective. Melville did not try to explain the acceptance of God or man's submission to fate; instead, he emphasized the importance of accepting historical necessity in a naturalistic universe (Bredahl 64).

In regard to Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*, there has been much speculation about the relationship between the whale and Captain Ahab. Critics have often argued about which one is the protagonist and which the antagonist. However, this argument is not Melville's main point. Tyrus Hillway believes that Melville conveyed the conviction that pursuit of the Absolute led either to frustration and madness or to self-destruction. He summarized Ahab's error into one idea: no acceptance of human limitations. Ahab believes that he can find the final truths of humankind, which will place him on the same plane as God. He is guilty of the fatal sin of pride; he sees himself as above and apart from other men. Near the end of the novel, Ahab is almost persuaded to end the pursuit of Moby Dick and resign to humankind in an imperfect world, but the good resolves die hastily. The inability to resist the urge to strike at fate and probe for the universal mysteries dooms Ahab's earthly life (Hillway 92).

*Moby Dick*, the white whale of the novel, symbolizes the mysteries of creation that confront and challenge the human mind (Sedgwick 98). The white color represents immortality, which is uncapturable to Captain Ahab (Wright 31-33). The whale is compared to the beast that "[did] rise up out of the sea" to overcome its virtuous opponent and curse God (Revelation 13:1-10). During the time of Revelation, vials and plagues are sent only to destroy the heathen world, or those who worshiped the beast with seven heads. Melville hinted that Moby Dick becomes the beast of the waters. The whale causes death and destruction only when it is being



hunted. The pursuit of the creature, either the whale or the beast of Revelation, results in ultimate doom (Wright 69).

Captain Ahab is usually compared to King Ahab, the seventh king of Israel after the division of the tribes. The comparison is openly discussed between Peleg and Ishmael: Peleg comments that "Ahab of old, thou knowest, was a crowned king!" Ishmael replied: "And a very vile one. When that wicked king was slain, the dogs, did they not lick his blood?" (Melville, *Moby Dick* 99). King Ahab, considered an able, energetic ruler, was also dangerous. An innovator and a patron of foreign gods, King Ahab was known to make trade agreements with pagan worshipers, which was against the prophetic party of Israel. Ahab is described with similar characteristics. He is a courageous and successful whaler who, like King Ahab, builds his home out of ivory. Captain Ahab's whaling ship is his home, and it is filled with trophies of whale bones and teeth. The *Pequod's* captain, just like the king of Israel, is known for worshiping pagan gods (Wright 64): he is "a grand, ungodly, god-like man" (Melville, *Moby Dick* 99). He is especially partial to the "spirit of fire." He, along with crew member Fedallah, adore every object of this cult: light, sun, stars, and wild fires (Wright 64). Melville's Ahab also does everything for money, except his final mission. He usually makes peace with his enemies to increase profits, but he can make no alliances with the whale. The profitable whale hunt turns into an unequivocal pursuit of the supernatural truth (Wright 62-63).

The deaths of King Ahab and Captain Ahab are also comparable. Both leaders turn to prophets to predict the results of their battles. King Ahab sought the advice of four hundred pagan prophets, and they all promised victory. Then he questioned Micaiah, a "prophet of the Lord" who predicted a brutal death for King Ahab. But the king did not heed the prophet's words, and death resulted. Captain Ahab's search for advice is a little different; the balance of influence is reversed. Instead of ignoring one piece of negative advice, the captain ignores all creation: intimate friends, testimonies of crews who had experienced the destruction of the whale, whisperings of his own heart, and omens in nature. He heeds the advice of Fedallah, who says that victory will result from the whale pursuit. By trusting the words of one pagan prophet, Captain Ahab leads his ship into a dead-end battle (Wright 65). The account of King Ahab's death is elaborated by details of violence more than that of any other Israel king: "and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" (I Kings 16:33). The brutal

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death of this king is justified by his sins. Compared to the losses of Melville's other fictitious ships, the destruction of the *Pequod* and its crew members is appalling, yet it is a fitting end for Ahab's monomania, a monomania that no other Melville captain possessed (Wright 67).

Herman Melville's novels were endless speculations on the nature of God and man's relationships with the Spirit. Nathalia Wright believed that the author's narrowness of religious concepts led to some of the greatest religious allegories ever written. *Typee*, *Billy Budd*, and *Moby Dick* are three of his novels that express a relationship and intertwine good and evil, happiness, and immortality. The books exhibit different variations of the three elements to express unique messages about religion to the reader (Wright 6-10).



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Man Vs. Woman Vs. Abortion

Susan Goddard

In Ernest Hemingway's short story, "Hills Like White Elephants," a modern controversy unfolds over the subject of an operation never named. From different viewpoints the inner turmoil of men and women regarding this personal issue is illustrated through dialogue and symbolism. In the end, we cannot be sure of the outcome, but we have participated in the struggle to find the answer.

The very position of the train station "between two lines of rails" (191) symbolizes the controversial nature of the issue - the two sides of the conflict - with the couple caught in the middle. This is a critical point in their lives, and their decision will have lasting effects. As implied by the fact that "[the train] stopped at this junction for two minutes and went on" (191), they have a very limited amount of time to make their decision, and then their lives will continue in whatever direction they choose.

The operation is also described by Hemingway in this way: "They just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural" (193). This description implies that the conflict concerns Jig's pregnancy and whether or not to have an abortion. The man is describing the opening of the cervix, after which the fetus will be expelled naturally or by suction. The couple has mixed emotions about bringing a child into the world, and this is the time to resolve the issue. They know they must come to an agreement that both can support, so that they can go on with their lives. The warning that "[o]nce they take it away, you never get it back" (194), could be interpreted in two ways. It could refer to the finality of abortion-once a baby is aborted, the deed cannot be reversed; or it could refer to the end of freedom and life as they knew it, if they allow the baby's intrusion.

Jig likens the taste of the new drink to "licorice" (192), and she adds that "Everything tastes like licorice. Especially all the things you've



waited so long for, like absinthe" (192). Licorice symbolizes a bitter-sweetness. Since *The Pocket Webster School and Office Dictionary* defines *absinthe* as "a bitter, aromatic liqueur of anise (a plant with aromatic seeds) and wormwood (a plant that yields a very bitter tasting oil)," the mention of absinthe also refers to bitter-sweetness, and the fact that it is a liqueur means one must wait until adulthood to try it. On one hand, she is happy about her condition; but on the other hand, she wants to please her mate and maintain a good relationship with him.

Jig's description of the land on either side of the tracks gives further indication of dilemma. The fact that this "country was brown and dry" (191) implies a condition of infertility or barrenness. Perhaps Jig is thinking of her own past (or future) without children. Yet "on the other side . . . fields of grain and trees along the banks" (193) symbolize a condition of fertility-of things growing in a natural state-and imply that she wants the pregnancy and looks forward to giving birth as a natural occurrence. The contrasting views of her surroundings help us to understand her inner turmoil.

The man, however, is unaware of these emotions. To such a man, a baby is not really a baby until it is born, and he can see it, even though he knows it will arrive at a given time. One can see this attitude when Jig's partner ". . . looked up the tracks but could not see the train" (195). He knew the train was scheduled to arrive in five minutes, but since he could not see it, he was nervous and unsure about its coming.

In the past, this couple had a freedom unencumbered by children, a freedom to travel and enjoy themselves. "The bags against the wall. . . [with] . . . labels on them from all the hotels" (194) symbolize the man's inner turmoil over his selfish desire to remain young and free. He tries to convince the woman that abortion is a "perfectly simple [procedure, and that] . . . We'll be fine afterward. Just like we were before [the baby]" (193). This pressure to persuade her to agree to the abortion perhaps comes from fear of the unknown, but the man also does not want the entire burden of guilt that could come afterward.

Finally, as they tire of arguing, Jig's agitated tone implies that she is against the idea of abortion. He realizes that forcing her to go through with it would only be a sacrifice of her desires for his. He "take[s] the bags over to the other side of the station" (194), symbolizing a change of heart. He has another drink by himself, taking his own bitter-sweet look at the situation, and "he look[s] at the people . . . waiting reasonably for the train" (195). He realizes then that he is not being reasonable in asking Jig

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to go against her conscience. Maybe he sees that everyone else patiently accepts his or her fate and makes the best of it.

Finally one has to be aware of the importance of Hemingway's title, "Hills Like White Elephants." *White elephant* could mean several different things. Perhaps Jig sees her pregnancy as something sacred to be protected, just as some religions view white elephants as sacred. Another interpretation could be that the pregnancy will result in a child, a white elephant, something of little value but costly to maintain. The first interpretation could only be Jig's attitude, whereas the subsequent interpretation would apply to the feelings of man in this story.

"Hills Like White Elephants" can be a perplexing story to read because so much that is central is never said. One must be aware of the definitions of the terms used to interpret the symbolism. Proper interpretation of Hemingway's symbolism is necessary to find all the clues one needs to make these expressive silences "pregnant" with meaning.



## Chaucer's Franklin: A New Order

Lynn Poole

Geoffrey Chaucer, born to a wealthy merchant family in 14th century England, was a gifted author whose life and work are subjects of interest even five hundred years after his death. His life was crowded by interesting detail. A survivor of the bubonic plague that killed one-third of England's population and led to a revolution in the existing social and economic structure, he was also captured and ransomed in a battle of the Hundred Years War. For many years Chaucer was an employee of the king's court, a position which provided him opportunity for extensive travel. Chaucer drew upon his years of travel and experience to create his most famous work *Canterbury Tales*. Written late in Chaucer's life, this complex story of thirty-one pilgrims on a journey to the shrine of St. Thomas Beckett at Canterbury presents a unique insight into medieval society.

The detailed descriptions of each pilgrim and the series of tales they relate contain a wealth of information about lifestyles of the medieval era as well as a revealing glimpse of the diverse personalities and attitudes of people living in that time period. Chaucer's writing style, which does not pronounce moral judgments on the pilgrims, has encouraged many readers to study *Canterbury Tales* in an attempt to interpret the personality and character of each pilgrim accurately. Some, such as the

Summoner, obviously fail to meet standards placed on them by society, while others, the Knight for example, perfectly fit the role assigned them by society. Many find the Franklin particularly difficult to analyze. However, a portrait of the Franklin can be constructed by making a careful study of the information Chaucer provides.

Chaucer begins his introduction of the Franklin by saying that he is "... a country gentleman and a freeman landowner ..." (Chaucer 9) traveling with a sergeant-at-law. The fact he is a companion to a distinguished sergeant-at-law, whose rank is similar to a modern day supreme court justice, suggests he holds a comparable social position, and it can be concluded he is a man of sufficient means, since he is a landowner. The Franklin's dress also supports the impression of wealth for he wore a dagger and silk purse, items which would only be worn together by a "... wealthy and distinguished ..." (Bowden 112) man. The choice of silk for his purse underscores the Franklin's financial position, and one might assume he wishes to draw attention to this detail for the purse is also white. White would provide a sharp contrast to the colorful gown commonly worn by a gentleman of the Franklin's standing, thereby drawing attention to this expensive accessory. His wealth is also evidenced by the fact "[t]hat in his home it snowed with food and drink" (Chaucer 10). Clearly, the Franklin is able to afford foods that are available to a person of wealth but beyond the reach of a peasant.

The image of a man who has the best money can buy and who tries to make others aware of this fact is offset by the picture of a white-bearded man with a cheerful ruddy face. According to medieval humours physiology, the ruddy complexion results from the dominance of blood over the four body fluids and is indicative of a sanguine temperament. Based on the definition of the sanguine temperament from the *Secreta Secretorum*, the Franklin must be one "who. . .should love joy and laughing, and company of women, and much sleep and singing..." and "... he shall be free and liberal ..." (Bowden 174). The sanguine person is an easy-going pleasure seeker. Chaucer reinforces these qualities in the Franklin by saying he is "Epicurus' own true son" (Chaucer 9). Epicurean philosophy, the one Greek philosophy barred from medieval schools, has been modified from generation to generation. Boece, Chaucer's translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, is a reasonable source for clarification of specific Epicurean qualities Chaucer wished to give to the Franklin. According to Boece, Epicurus "judged and established that de-



lite is the sovereign good" (Bowden 175). The sanguine Franklin, who seeks enjoyment obviously finds pleasure in worldly "delites." Chaucer devotes twelve lines to detailing the variety of foods ever present in the Franklin's home and that are obviously a source of pleasure to him. He had "All the delicacies you could think" and the "... cook would catch it..." (Chaucer 10) if the food was not prepared in an enticing manner. Being "... St. Julian to the country round" (Chaucer 9), the Franklin doesn't utilize a typical medieval table that can be dismantled after meals (Bowden 175), but keeps a "... great fixed table..." (Chaucer 10) that is ready for guests at all times. This fact completes the picture of a cheerful, easy going man who takes great pleasure from eating and the company of others.

Chaucer also emphasizes the Franklin's service in public office. The Franklin "... often served as MP for the shire" (Chaucer 10), i.e., he served as a member of parliament. Though this honorable position was commonly held by a knight, counties sometimes elected untitled men (Gerould 273). This fact would place the Franklin on the same social level as the Knight. The Franklin also held the prestigious post of sheriff who was "... the king's local representative" (Gerould 274). The fact that this position required a man of social prestige and personal ability (Gerould 274) reinforces the Franklin's high standing in the community. In addition to his other services, the Franklin has served as county auditor, another position of importance and responsibility. Chaucer sums up the Franklin by saying he is "A model squireen..." (Chaucer 10) or *vavasour* in the original English. *Vavasour* is a feudal title that places the Franklin beneath a baron in the medieval social structure. John Selden points out that Chaucer likely gave the Franklin this title to emphasize his rank and heighten the compliment paid him by reference to his numerous public service appointments (Gerould 275).

Although his public appointments prove the Franklin must be a man of rank and prestige, there is evidence he feels inferior in some way. The Franklin's lavish compliments of the Squire suggests he feels beneath the squire. He reinforces this sense of inferiority by wishing that his son were like the Squire. His son's preference for the company of commoners rather than gentlemen "... from whom he could learn true good breeding..." (Chaucer 361) distresses the Franklin. The host's rude comment concerning the Franklin's admiration of good breeding suggests the Franklin's rank does not command respect. The host's comment and subsequent demand for the Franklin's tale prompts the Franklin to seek



the host's acceptance and good will by saying "Pray heaven above that my tale gives you pleasure" (Chaucer 362). This incident between the Franklin, Squire, and Host supports the view that, even though he is a man of financial means and civic importance, the Franklin occupies an awkward social position. He does not have the title that would admit him to the noble upper class, yet his wealth and education place him above the lower classes. With the deterioration of the feudal system, the Franklin found himself part of a developing upper middle class. While established classes were well-defined, the Franklin's place in the social structure was unclear. Thence, the Franklin's concern for good breeding suggests he preferred to be part of the higher class, but his lack of a title prevented his realization of this goal.

While the general prologue contributes much to the Franklin's portrait, an examination of his talk provides an even greater insight into his character and personal opinions. The Breton lay the Franklin chooses to recite gives further evidence of the Franklin's preoccupation with noble behavior. Although the lay, like the Franklin, is a blending of elements from the noble and folk classes, it is also a genre associated with nobility. So again, the Franklin's desire to advance his social position is evident. However, his story hints that certain noble attitudes can be improved upon. While marriages among English nobility were arranged for financial gain, the Franklin's tale depicts a marriage based on love and understanding. The Franklin presents a very modern view of marriage unlike the accepted standards of his day for the upper class. He encourages patience and compromise by both husband and wife to preserve love. He wisely points out that many things "... often cause a man to do or say what he'll regret" (Chaucer 364). It is not reasonable to "... retaliate for every slight ..." and self-control must be exercised to preserve harmony (Chaucer 364). This suggests a very progressive attitude in a society where women were considered inferior beings, in no way a man's equal, and where excessive love in marriage was considered sinful. The Franklin's great understanding of human nature as well as his own liberal nature are reflected in his ideas on marriage.

The Franklin's tale also speaks much of honor, a trait closely associated with nobility, not the middle class. However, the tale's ending suggests honorable behavior is not related to one's rank or title, but the content of one's heart. Dorigen, the wife in the tale, courteously refuses a squire's sexual advances by promising to be his lover if he can remove all the rocks on the coast of Brittany, a seemingly impossible task. The



squire hires a magician to create the illusion that the rocks have disappeared. Dorigen prefers suicide to being an unfaithful wife, but her husband insists that honor, keeping her promise, is more important. The squire is so touched by the sacrifice of Dorigen and her husband that "[h]e thought it better to deny himself his pleasure" (Chaucer 382) than to come between husband and wife. After hearing the squire's explanation of the situation, the magician forgives the squire's debt to him saying "... God forbid ... a scholar should not act the gentleman ... " (Chaucer 384). So by placing honor above all else, Dorigen and her husband have inspired compassionate, honorable behavior in others. It seems the Franklin feels honor is not limited by class, and the world could be a better place if everyone attempted to behave honorably. The Franklin's insightful and innovative ideas clearly indicate he is a man ahead of his time.

At the time *Canterbury Tales* was written, England was entering a period of important changes. The social order where status was determined by occupation or by birth was being replaced by a system where wealth defined position. The "three estates" of the old order, which grouped society into warriors, clergy, and laborers, provided no comfortable place for a man of wealth and prestige like the Franklin. However, he can be easily placed in the upper class of the new system. Indeed, the new ideas and philosophies that would come to England with the northern migration of the Italian Renaissance are foreshadowed by some of the Franklin's challenges of existing standards. Rather than representing a section of medieval society, Chaucer's Franklin depicts a new character type, who, along with his class, will become dominant in the Renaissance. Perhaps then the critics' difficulty in analyzing the Franklin arises not from his ambiguity but from their efforts to judge him by medieval standards. He is perhaps best viewed not as a remnant of the old order but as the precursor of a new one.

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## Paradise Defined

David Basham

In the fifteenth century Michel de Montaigne wrote several treatises describing his relativist philosophy. In these essays Montaigne offered the theory that there are no absolutes to values, morals and beliefs, because each culture would define these ideas and terms in relation to itself. Montaigne further argued that relativism explains how the meanings of certain terms and ideas are altered over the passage of time. The metamorphosis of the archetypal views of "paradise" from the Biblical times to the Middle Ages, as exemplified through literature, is an excellent example of Montaigne's relativist doctrine.

For Western civilizations, the Bible obviously serves as the fountainhead from which any definitions of "paradise" are derived. In Genesis, we are presented with the premise that "paradise" is to be equated with the Garden of Eden. This incarnation is a vision of naturalism with its inclusion of "every tree that is pleasing to the sight, and good for food" and the presence of "every beast of the field and every fowl in the air." The river that waters the garden and then divides into the four great rivers of the earth is also indicative of the incredible natural beauty of Eden. The word "paradise" comes from the Greek form of an eastern word for "pleasure ground," which Eden certainly was. This Eden was capable of providing both sanctuary and sustenance within a magnificent display of nature.

In the Old English poem "The Phoenix," this "natural Beauty" of Paradise/Eden is expanded upon in great detail. Eden is "the loveliest of lands," one that is ever harbored from the elements as "no rain or snow, or breath of frost fire, or freezing hail or fall of rime, etc.," ever occur. The poet adds an account of the spiritual nature of "paradise": there is "no pain or weeping or sign of sorrow, no age or anguish or narrow death, no ending of life or coming of evil . . . ." There also appeared the Christ-

image of the phoenix, which complements the early Christian belief that Christ would lead his followers to a paradise where they would live forever. The religious depiction of Paradise/Eden indicates that there were concerns that this "paradise" also require the need to beautify the soul before God.

During the later Middle Ages, certain events and forces helped to shape the literary image of an almost metaphysical "paradise." The adventures of Marco Polo to the Far East in the late 1200's shortened the distance between East and West and raised the question of Eden's location. Scholasticism, as shaped by Thomas Aquinas in his attempt to fuse science and religion, encouraged speculation about the location of and the manner of ascension to heaven. As the possibility of discovering the location of the Garden of Eden increased, the nature of Paradise seemed to need to change as well. For all of its spiritual and physical perfection, a vital characteristic of paradise was that it must be guarded from man's visage and therefore must be unobtainable.

Dante's vision of paradise marked an important moment of transition for the identity of "paradise." In the third and final section of his *Divine Comedy*, Dante clearly indicates that the true paradise is not to be found in this world through the Garden of Eden. Dante instead placed Eden in Purgatory to show that through the blood of Christ man could surpass the state of Adam by moving into Heaven. Dante describes the ascension as a journey into man's own soul. His vision also recounts being engulfed in the "Living Light" which "sole dwellest in Thyself, sole understandest Thyself and, by Thyself understood and understanding, lovest and smilest on Thyself!" This exclamation captures Dante's association of "paradise" with both the Passion and the Ascension. Dante writes that the soul has come "perfect circle" in the presence of the Trinity, represented by "the three colours and three circles within one dimension."

These three examples clearly show a relativist tendency in the literary identification of Paradise as it moves from the biblical to the medieval era. Paradise, once equated with Eden, was later equated with Heaven as priests, poets, and scholars adapted "paradise" to meet the intellectual concerns of a particular time. As man's capability and competency grew, "paradise" was further elevated to just beyond his reach.



## How Symbols Are Used In "The Celestial Omnibus"

*Jeff Mutchler*

The way a writer uses a symbol is similar to the way a painter chooses his colors for a work of art, as both are mediums of each artist's work. A symbol (or a color) represents something other than what is readily apparent to the naked eye. For example, the color red may symbolize anger, whereas yellow may have more sanguine connotations. In the same way that a painter uses colors not only to paint a picture but also to symbolize a thought or feeling, E.M. Forster's "The Celestial Omnibus" abounds in symbols that are rich, alive, and full of profound meaning, provided that the reader is open to the experience. Mr. Forster's "Omnibus" presents the audience with the opportunity to see what can happen to a reader if he opens his eyes -both physical and literal eyes-to the message that the symbols are illustrating.

The little boy is a prime example of how a symbol is used to prove a point, or in this case, to represent a small percentage to the literary public. Literally, this story is about a boy who finds a magical omnibus that whisks him away to a better place. But as a symbol, the boy gives us an understanding of what we, as an audience, should be like. The reason why Mr. Forster chose a young boy to represent us is fairly simple: a young boy is inquisitive and full of energy, eager to try new adventures just as we, the audience, should be when we read a book. You can see that the boy was inquisitive in many ways. When he finds out that there is an omnibus, he immediately goes to look for it, which is not easy, for the alley he has to pass through is "... terribly dark ..." and "... requires some courage" (312). When he finally gets to the omnibus, he does not hesitate to get on. Not only that, but he asks the driver, Sir Thomas Browne, many questions ranging from "Have you been a driver always?" (315) to



"Where will it stop?" (316). Just like the little boy, we should also be ready to question the why and the how of a book. We need to ask ourselves, "What is the author saying/ implying, and what does it mean to me?" To answer these questions, we must be open to what the author is trying to convey.

As we follow the boy on his magical bus ride, we begin to see the symbol of driver and carriage take shape. The driver of each omnibus is an author, each one using different styles and writing on different levels; the buses themselves are a sample of books that they have written. For example, Sir Thomas Browne's bus is "... well-built, [although] cold and somewhat musty" (314), as is his style of writing: old and stiff, functional and punctual to the last. Sir Browne, after all, was a seventeenth-century author, and the prose of this era does indeed seem "musty" to modern ears. On the other hand, Dante's omnibus is "... large, roomy, and constructed with extreme regularity, every part exactly answering to every other part" (320), describing the style of Dante: logical, comfortable, and easy to get used to. What is unique is that the boy can accommodate both of the drivers and their omnibuses even though their styles differ. After all, are they both not writers? In the same way, if we have open minds turned toward literature, we can digest and understand the works of Poe and King, Dante and Eliot, all the while being hungry for more.

As a closed-minded individual, Mr. Bons cannot see nor feel the total experience of the journey as the boy had. Where the boy is open to everything, Mr. Bons is already set in his ways and ignorant of what is going on around him. When the boy sees the rainbow bridge that leads into the kingdom, Mr. Bons replies, "You distract me. I wish to meditate on beauty" (321). He is blissfully unaware of what the boy is experiencing. In the end, as a "reward" for being stiff-necked and unwilling to open his eyes to the wonders around him, Mr. Bons is sent back down to London in more or less one piece. As Mr. Bons symbolizes the closed-minded public, the audience can see what can happen if someone like Mr. Bons does not appreciate the work for what it is and only sees in it the cultural status symbol it provides. The boy's reward is one of acceptance from the kingdom, which is rich and full of life. The reward the open-minded reader receives is similar, as he is transported by the book into a different world of romance, honor, glory, and adventure that only a book can provide. It is only by trying to see what the author is saying/ implying that one can fully appreciate his work.



Symbols are the lifeblood of a story. A good symbol can keep both the plot and the mind alive and exciting, just as a dull or improper symbol can kill the story and make it uninteresting. When used as they are in "The Celestial Omnibus," symbols become very powerful tools that the writer uses to influence, inform, and initiate the reader into his ways, workings, and world.

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